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ABSTRACT

Teaching the general student is the focus of this journal issue. The nine articles deal with the following topics: teaching the noncollege-bound students, strategies for teaching complex literature to general students, teaching western novels as an introduction to literature, linguistics for the junior high school general student, teaching how to follow directions, popular culture in the English classroom, a selection of 100 books with under 200 pages, responsive teaching and communication in the English classroom, and bibliotherapy in the general curriculum. (FL)

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Teaching the General Student

Dorothy Matthews, Editor

ILLINOIS ENGLISH BULLETIN

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Teaching the Non-College Bound: Reflections and Questions

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Years ago Sam was a student in one of my basic English II classes at Thornton. Although he was a rather likable young man, he was neither especially motivated nor totally non-productive, standing somewhere in the middle of the group in achievement. In my estimation he was far from being "college material," as were his classmates. Thus, I attempted to work with him and the others mainly on communication skills and, truthfully, did not expect much from them. In fact, I considered many of them to be rather pathetic creatures destined for dropping out and joining the ranks of the economic dependents or some other category of societal misfits. At best, they might "get by."

Biased? Ignorant? Yes — I certainly was, and I am not proud of the attitude I had. Sam, on the other hand, must not have been affected by my prejudice and negativism. Somewhere between his sophomore and senior years this "non-college bound" young man became a different person. How and why I shall never know. What I do know is that after graduating from high school, he attended Thornton Community College and went on to earn a degree from Governors State University. According to a younger brother, Sam is now a chaplain in Texas and "doing fine."

Sam's case raises some interesting and, I think, serious questions. For openers, if we English teachers are somehow to teach non-college bound students in a special way, how do we accurately identify such students? Are test scores, I.Q. scores, stanines, and the like adequate? Moreover, once we have identified them beyond all doubt, will the label fit forever and ever? Or, do young people change in terms of goals, motivation, effort, and achievement? If they do, and I believe a number change in very significant

ways, how certain can we be in categorizing students as non-college bound and setting up some type of valid, meaningful program for them?

To be sure, at Thornton we have many students who are deficient in reading and writing skills and need all the help and encouragement we can give them. A substantial number of them are enrolled in our level two or developmental classes from one to four years. In the junior year some may be in our American Writers-Contemporary American Readings course. As seniors some may be taking Modern Communication-Contemporary World Readings. Although we tend to think of such students as terminal students who have been placed in courses appropriate for them, some, to our surprise, will graduate and then attend the community college, upgrade their reading and writing abilities in special English classes, and, of all things, continue on to experience success in higher education. Others will attend a school such as Illinois State University, be referred to the writing center, strengthen composition skills, and find themselves on their way to a degree. Again, are we so sure of ourselves in sorting out students that we can confidently differentiate between those who are college-bound and those who are not?

Besides the difficulty in classifying students according to where we/they think they will be or ought to be heading, there is another matter to consider. Are there not ideas, themes, concerns in literature that are relevant and can be made meaningful for all kinds of students? It seems to me that vocationally-oriented students who are certain that they are not going on to college can, nevertheless, benefit from a humanities course or a course in multiethnic literature if they are made aware of the value of such a course in enabling them to learn about others and, one would hope, themselves.

Consider, if you would, American Civilization and Communication, the two-credit, double-period course that my colleague Mike Devine and I teach. It was not established exclusively for students intending to pursue higher education. To succeed in ACC, one does not have to be a superbrain destined for a university. In fact, as Mike and I conduct the course, we are minimally concerned about students' post-high school plans. Instead, our intent is to provide a topically structured course which encompasses worthwhile experiences and materials that provoke thought, open minds, and enrich lives. Surely justice, migration, war, prejudice, the elderly, and death are, or ought to be, of concern to all types of students. The value and significance of these and other topics will depend on how Mike and I approach them and how involved

students become in their reading, writing, discussions, panels, skits, multi-media projects, and other activities — not on their after-graduation goals and plans.

Finally, it is time to lay to rest a misconception that has existed for years and, seemingly, continues to plague some of us in the profession. It would appear that there are those teaching on the secondary level who place courses into either of two classifications, academic and non-academic. What about many of the courses? Are they really of one type or the other? Is there a clear-cut distinction?

As Dr. Johnston Karr, one of Thornton's assistant principals, pointed out so well to me, there are many subjects that are neither purely academic nor non-academic. In an English course the class may be exploring possible symbols in Frost's poetry one day. Such a session could well be considered scholarly or academic. However, at another time the same class may be reviewing quotation marks or doing some vocabulary drill — hardly near the top of Bloom's taxonomy. I would go so far as to suggest that much of what many of us do in English calls for the lesser cognitive abilities involved in drill, repetition, and memorization. Conversely, a class in vocational electricity may, at times, be dealing with some highly technical, challenging material calling for higher-level cognitive processes. Thus, is an English course academic and an electricity course non-academic?

Sometimes coupled with a misconception about the nature of a course has been an attitude which I consider most unfair and harmful. Certain teachers, not only of English but also of other so-called academic subjects, have harbored genuine prejudice toward students who they knew were in vocational-technical classes. After all, such students were obviously not going on to college; hence, how much could be expected from them in academic courses? Undoubtedly a number of these stigmatized youth suffered in one way or another. I can imagine how they felt about those teachers who subtly or not so subtly discriminated against them. Surely in many cases their motivation and achievement must have diminished. Others, I suspect, ignored the bias or decided to show they were not stupid and, in either case, went on to college and obtained a degree.

College-bound and non-college bound, academic and non-academic (or vocational or whatever) — these labels seem to be terribly final, frozen designations. Are they warranted? Are they fair? Dare we allow them to determine our perception, placement, and instruction of students?

Strategies for Teaching Complex Literature to General Students

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"Between the novelist and his most receptive reader," Ralph Ellison has written, "there must exist a body of shared assumptions — concerning reality and necessity, possibility and freedom, personality and value . . . [and] a set of artistic conventions."[1] This statement helps explain the special problems high school and college literature teachers often have working with "general" students. For how does one come to know about — let alone share — Shakespeare's assumptions about the perfect noble, Wordsworth's convictions about the nobility of the human heart, Conrad's probing look at the "heart of darkness," Woolf's probes into the flux of time, or Beckett's obliteration of time as a meaningful frame of reference? It is by reading, by going to plays, by turning to reviews in magazines, and by a complex of similar experiences that people develop broad, sophisticated backgrounds against which to respond to literature. Clearly some people do such things. Most of us know we should do more of them, as we hurry from our after-school meetings to stacks of waiting student papers. But such behavior is not typical of general students.

Almost by definition, general students are those who bring few such experiences with them into high school and college literature classes. In addition, many general students have reading problems or other academic weaknesses that can interfere with their appreciation of literature. Many of them, too, see education chiefly as a source of job skills and are less interested in abstract thinking and theoretical discussions than in physical activities and interpersonal relationships. Such characteristics, and especially their limited reading experience, often make general students unsophisticated readers of literature. But this does not mean that they are stupid, insensitive people, in spite of the dullness and lack of sensitivity they may show toward the literature we teach — and the way we teach it.

General students often have considerable potential for responding meaningfully to complex literature, and they can be a great joy to teach. But their motivations and prior experiences with literature require that teachers modify the "academic" approaches that may work with more widely-read and academically-motivated

students. Educational psychologist K. Patricia Cross suggests something like this in a pamphlet describing what she calls the "new" college student: "The new learners . . . sometimes look unsophisticated to us, and we are arrogant enough to think that when they understand our academic traditions, they will value what we value. But I think the handwriting is on the wall . . ." Cross goes on: "we are the ones who need to reexamine our attitude about education."[2]

Such an examination, of course, is something that each teacher must make independently. My personal re-examination has led me to develop six general strategies which I would like to offer for your reflection.

Run At Strength

It is a cliché of TV sportscasters and armchair quarterbacks that a football coach should have the team run at its opponent's strongest linemen in order to convince itself that it can win. Similarly, teachers working with complex literature and general students should not run away from difficult critical problems or deny that there are difficult aspects of a work. Nor should they oversimplify to such an extent that students sense condescension. Instead, the teacher should treat the students respectfully, the literature as a worthy opponent, and, together, teacher and students should attack whatever problems need to be attacked.

I have found it useful to tell the class in advance when we are getting into a particularly thorny thicket, and to admit the befuddlement I felt with the problem until I had read the work several times with critical footnotes. And I have found it useful to organize courses or units around exactly those things that I expect to be hardest for the students — to attack my opponent at its strongest points, that is, to show the class that we can win. In contemporary fiction, I have found that technical matters often are the most confusing for students. So I once organized an entire course so that I could treat fictional techniques, not as abstract terms, but as meaningful parts of the course's main content, and so that I could help students cope with the intellectual and emotional challenges posed by the innovative and often alienating use of technique.

Of course, it is one thing to admit the difficulty of a work and to lead a class directly into confrontation with the difficulty, but quite another thing to use teaching techniques that force students into single combat with literary problems too subtle for non-specialists. And one way to keep students from feeling overwhelmed by complex literature is to use the next strategy.

Focus Your Teaching

A "focused" literature course is one with fairly well-defined limits and a thematic center. A semester survey of American literature is not focused, but then neither is an overview course on American humor. Both of these courses share an unfocused breadth; they purport to survey or otherwise "cover" the area included in the course. A focused course has a thematic core on which the attention of students and the teacher can be centered. The course may teach a great deal more than the theme, but it does so by relating ideas and material to the focus-theme.

In the NCTE book, *Re-Vision: Classroom Practices in Teaching English, 1974-1975,* for instance, I describe a modern fiction course focused on an analogy between fiction writing and photography. In this analogy, plot and setting formed the background; characterization placed figures in the picture; point of view allowed various kinds of portrait study; and innovative handling of fictional techniques created various special effects. The analogy, admittedly, was simplistic, and it did not exhaust all of the ideas with which the course dealt. But it provided a framework — a sort of academic hat rack on which students were able to hang information, ideas, and other literary haberdashery during the course.

Another time, I focused a course around the idea that literature is a key that can unlock culture. The class examined *Birds of America* to discover what we needed to know about art, music, and philosophy in order to understand Mary McCarthy's novel. Then we turned to comments that William Barrett makes about the spirit of modern culture in *Irrational Man,* and for the rest of the course we discussed works — ranging from *The Oresteia* to *Hamlet* to *Waiting for Godot* — in order to determine whether Barrett's generalizations were valid.

In neither of these courses did I feel that I really had "covered" the material. But in each, I knew that students not accustomed to reading complex literature had grown in their understanding of significant ideas and techniques, and in their ability to read such literature for themselves. The focused quality of the courses helped by providing a structure and some limitations within which students felt more comfortable. And within these focused courses, I made use of several other strategies.

Read More, Not More Deeply

Students who prefer physical activities and social relationships to abstract thinking and who test the value of their studies against their short-term occupational goals can become restless or even hostile during extended class treatment of a play or novel. My ex-

perience with general students is that they do not necessarily resist reading complex material — provided they have the ability to read it and provided they are given useful guidance — but that they do resist the kind of abstraction and analysis that come with spending two weeks on one novel. So my approach is to read more works, to spend less time on each one, and fight the temptation to try to squeeze every nuance of meaning from every poem or novel. (Obviously, this strategy is inappropriate for students or classes with serious reading problems. But it can work very well with general students with little literary background and academic motivation.)

Structure the Reading Assignments

Students who lack some sense of the literary traditions surrounding the works they read face a difficult task when they turn to a complex work. Their puzzlement over techniques or allusions or historical settings easily can turn to disgust or hostility unless the teacher gives them some useful guidance before they start to read. The central framework within a focused course helps to do this. In addition, I have found it useful to use rather specific reading report forms for almost all the readings in my courses.

These are not study guides in the conventional sense. They do not ask students to formulate short, complete answers to questions. Instead, my reading report form outlines areas on which I want students to take notes while they read. It is preparation for class discussion, in the sense that the form lets students record page numbers and brief notes in categories that I know will be useful when we begin discussing the work. Once, for instance, I used such a reading report form with *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*. Earlier in the term, we had read *Waiting for Godot;* we had just finished discussing *Hamlet;* and now we came to *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern* at the very end of a course examining the artistic and intellectual qualities of modern culture. So I asked students to respond to four questions:

1. Jot down the page numbers of sections that seem original to Tom Stoppard's play, and jot down pages of sections that follow *Hamlet* closely.
2. Look for passages that show that Stoppard has altered the characters of Rozencrantz and Guildenstern. For each passage, make a note about how he changed them.
3. Record the page numbers on which you find things that remind you of *Waiting for Godot.*
4. Find things in the play that seem to show a "modern" spirit or tone.

This kind of guidance guarantees close reading. The purpose of such reading is to prepare students for class discussion that is spirited, thorough, and somewhat analytic. But it results in such discussion only if the teacher resists the temptation to deliver dazzling critical performances that convey as much to students about their *in*ability as about the teacher's knowledge of literature. And so the next strategy.

Make the Students Do the Work

Students who are not especially comfortable with careful reading, it seems to me, need as much as anything else to gain confidence in their own abilities. They need to develop a surer sense of their own emotional and critical responses — responses which they can use in the literature class, and in their contacts with films, television shows, and recreational novels later in their lives. William Irmscher suggests something like this when, in *The Nature of Literature*, he connects literary study and literary criticism to those conscious or sub-conscious responses we all have "everytime we hear a speech, see a film, or listen to a concert." We all tend to be critics, Irmscher writes, in that we "want to ask questions, try to understand, and come to conclusions about things we like or do not like. In other words, we respond." Literary criticism, Irmscher goes on, "is simply a type of response to reading," and it "enables us to bring what we read into our own personal experience and thus to respond to it fully and completely."[3]

But learning to trust their responses — indeed, learning that they have reason to trust their responses — cannot come from passively listening to a lecture, no matter how good it is. It comes from hearing a classmate make a perceptive comment and realizing, "Oh, yea, a student can do that." And it comes from offering a tentative statement, seeing others smile or nod, and hearing the teacher pick up the comment as a springboard for a related point. So, teachers working with general students should try whatever instructional ploys they have to foster genuine discussion — with give-and-take between students, and not merely student replies to specific questions from the teacher.

The use of reading report forms help foster such discussion. Armed with an arsenal of notes and page numbers, students can respond to opening questions with more confidence and in a more substantial way than they can when they are relying on shaky memories of vague impressions they felt when they were reading. But having a lot of pertinent page numbers and brief notes does not mean that students will rush to start discussing a literary work. In fact, general students may well be basically unmotivated to start

commenting about abstract, intellectual points. And to overcome this problem is the goal of the final strategy.

Stimulate Student Responses

As William Irmscher's ideas on literary criticism suggest, personal response comes before critical response to literature. Unless readers first have personal responses, they cannot go on "to ask questions, try to understand, and come to conclusions about" what they are reading. Much practical, non-technical criticism is little more than an answer to the question, "Why?" (Why do I feel a kind of optimism at the end of Bernard Malamud's novel *The Fixer*? Why does the sun rise and set in such a peculiar way in *Waiting for Godot*? Why does Shakespeare's Sonnet 130 say such unflattering things about a woman who is supposed to be "as rare/as any she belied with false compare"? Why don't I think *As You Like It* is as good a play as *Twelfth Night*?) And unless readers respond when they read a novel or see a play — and unless they are mindful enough of their responses to ask questions about them — they certainly cannot go on to try out tentative answers.

Student response to literature can be stimulated with out-of-class assignments, such as these which are based on suggestions in David Bleich's *Readings and Feelings*.[4]

1. As they read a play or novel for the first time, have students keep track of words, passages, details to which they react strongly. Later, give directions for writing: "Review your list of reactions and start writing. Write rapidly at first — keep your fingers moving, brainstorm on paper — about *how* you react to each passage and *why* you react that way. After you have a couple of pages of rapid jottings, go back to the how and why questions and write direct answers."
2. Have students keep track of specific words that seem important, or meaningful, or interesting. Later, give this assignment: "What is the most important word in the poem? Explain why you consider it to be so important."
3. Have students decide what seems to be the most important passage in a play or novel. Then have them explain in writing why they consider the passage to be so important — whether it is important to the way the work fits together, whether it is also personally meaningful, etc.

Students inclined more to interpersonal relationships than to abstract study, however, may find it more enjoyable to develop their responses in the social context of the classroom.

So have students act out a key scene from a play, and see what kind of discussion starts once students have stood up and re-

sponded in hammy delivery and awkward gestures. Ask students to find some character with whom they most identify, and then invite (but not force) students to share their choices and talk about the differences. Ask students what the worst part of a book was or what the hardest thing about the day's assignment is — and move later from the negative responses into other territory. But get students to respond. And once they have started responding, work to keep them talking meaningfully, and gradually turn the class toward the material students collected on their reading reports and finally toward the focused theme of the course.

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[1] "Society, Morality, and the Novel," in Granville Hicks, ed., *The Living Novel: A Symposium*, New York: Collier Books, 1962, p. 68.

[2] *Serving the New Clientele for Post-Secondary Education*, Princeton: Educational Testing Service, 1973, p. 9.

[3] *The Nature of Literature*, New York: Holt, 1975, p. 1.

[4] *Readings and Feelings: An Introduction to Subjective Criticism*, Urbana, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1975.

Pop Culture and Intro to Lit: A Case for Teaching Westerns

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In the recent past, popular culture has become recognized as a legitimate field of study, one that proves useful, in fact, in broadening the scope of literary history courses and in teaching composition and rhetoric. We argue that popular materials also have their place in introducing general students to the critical reading of literary texts. Far from serving as a standard of ordinariness against which to measure the degree of excellence of "fine" literature, popular fiction — e.g., Westerns, Whodunits, Science Fiction, Romances — provides a solid training ground for the instructor trying to sharpen students' literary responses.

We have two principal reasons for using popular culture to introduce students to literary criticism, one plainly strategic and one more broadly theoretical. In this time of crises — reading as well as writing — it is good strategy to use popular fiction precisely be-

cause it is popular; readily accessible and widely read, it has not been swept aside by the technological advances that have turned Americans by and large into a viewing rather than a reading public. Indeed, the visual treatments of such prose fiction as *Gone with the Wind, Exodus, The Exorcist, Shane,* and *Ten Little Indians* sent countless viewers to the books. The very popularity of best-selling texts like these makes the important point that literature does not exist only in the rarefied air of the English classroom; well-written, engaging fiction is alive and well out in society. It can be found at a corner drugstore, in a neighbor's home, on a crowded beach.

There is, moreover, theoretical justification for using popular fiction to teach literary interpretation. Given the multiplicity of critical theories available today, we must ask ourselves about the goal of the (often required) skills course in reading and writing about literature. It is not enough to expose students to literary modes and traditions so that they can classify whatever text they might happen upon. Students, especially the non-majors, must be encouraged to experience literature and to analyze the nature of their responses to various texts. This analysis is not a cut-and-dry procedure, since texts affect different readers differently and since there are, in addition to the intention of the reader, other contributors to the meaning of any piece of literature. In her article "Critical Thinking" (*College English,* 38 [November 1976], 225), Priscilla Clark notes that the intention of the author and the "intentionality" of the text must also be taken into consideration and stresses that "the literary critic must contend with variability along all three dimensions" . . . quite a task for the beginner. Popular texts because of their formulaic structure reduce the variables to a manageable number or, at least, lead the reader to anticipate certain basic relationships among author, text, and reader. As Clark points out, formula fiction "is more focused than other literary texts and consequently the various intentions are more likely to coincide." And, once again, the simple fact that a mass audience has responded to these texts provides a strong impetus for investigating why and how such fiction works.

What follows is a discussion of the possible uses in the Intro to Lit course of Owen Wister's *The Virginian.* We have selected this novel as a representative text from one genre of popular fiction to point up the possibilities inherent in various types of best sellers. The Western has always been a rich source for eliciting reader response. We have selected our points of reference — setting, character, point of view, plot, and theme — not because they are the only touchstones for analyzing literary response but because they

are the basic tools studied in most Intro to Lit courses as well as the criteria used to organize the texts available for such a course: e.g, Sylvan Barnet's *A Short Guide to Writing About Literature* (Little, Brown), Edward J. Gordon's *Writing About Imaginative Literature* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich), Margaret Bryan and Boyd Davis' *Writing About Literature and Film* (HBJ), Ken Symes' *Two Voices: Writing About Literature* (Houghton Mifflin), and Ray Kytle and Juanita Lyons' *The Wrought Response: Reading and Writing About Literature* (Dickinson).

For the instructor trying to teach students to notice the ways in which setting, character, point of view, plot, and theme are integrated in a single piece of fiction, the Western is worth considering. Because it is practically impossible to separate these five elements of fiction in a Western, this form of popular literature offers special insights into an understanding of the whole and how this whole is more than just the sum of its parts. What is more, the whole Western is permeated with adventure. Consequently, the reader is deeply involved in the action of the novel — he is a part of the setting which gives this genre its name, and he is engaged in the events which allow the famous Western hero to demonstrate his mythic proportions.

Probably the most obvious characteristic of any Western is the setting, the frontier environment which creates an atmosphere of challenge, expectation, and struggle. In *The Virginian*,[1] nineteenth-century Wyoming *is* Frederick Jackson Turner's frontier: that American place of possibility and growth. More specifically, the setting is a combination of untamed wilderness and uncivilized beauty; it is a "wild country" (p. 21), but it is a place of "clear plains," of "great, still air," of a world "flooded with sunlight" (p. 36).

Wister's descriptions continually remind us of the loneliness of this setting:

> They forded Butte Creek, and, crossing the well-travelled trail which follows down the Drybone, turned their faces toward the uninhabited country that began immediately, as the ocean begins off a sandy shore. And as a single mast on which no sail is shining stands at the horizon and seems to add a loneliness to the surrounding sea, so the long gray line of fence, almost a mile away . . . stretched along the waste ground and added desolation to the plain. No solitary watercourse with margin of cottonwoods or willow thickets flowed here to stripe the dingy, yellow world with interrupting green, nor were cattle to be seen dotting the distance, nor moving objects at all, nor any bird in the soundless air. (pp. 183-4)

[1] Page references are to the 1968 edition published by Houghton Mifflin.

This lonely place is, as the Virginian says, not like "settled places . . . back in the States" where anyone — even a poor man — has a home. Not so in the West, for here "a man's home is apt to be his saddle blanket" (p. 37). Without a home and with only the vast frontier surrounding him, the Westerner has no protection from either the natural elements or human enemies. He is utterly and completely alone.

In this untamed and lonely Wild West, only a special kind of person can survive and only an extraordinary sort of individual can win. And in the character of the anonymous Virginian we have the heroic ideal of not only the survivor, but also — and more importantly — the victor. He is the man who will never be conquered by the elements or his enemies; he is the solitary hero who has developed within himself the ability to adapt to the rugged environment which he realizes is much bigger than himself. For the instructor who wants to encourage students to consider the various ways an author develops character, the Virginian is ideal: the reader is given the hero's external appearance, sees others' responses to him, and observes his actions and interactions throughout the novel.

His outward appearance is imposing. On the first page of the novel he is described as climbing down from a gate of the corral "with the undulations of a tiger, smooth and easy, as if his muscles flowed beneath his skin" (p. 7). (Later this animal image is again presented, for the Virginian is referred to as a "Bengal tiger": powerful, restrained, in control.)

The Virginian's solid, calm presence also demands the respect of others; his firm handling of people impresses even his enemies. What is perhaps the most famous line of the novel — "When you call me that, *smile*" — is memorable not only because of the words themselves but also because of this special, controlled way with which they are spoken: "And with a voice as gentle as ever, the voice that sounded almost like a caress, but drawling a very little more than usual, so that there was almost a space between each word, he issued his orders. . . ." (p. 23) Thus the Virginian's physical strength as well as his powerful presence equip him for both the natural and human challenges of the untamed West.

To describe him as simply a strong man with a dominant personality, however, would be inadequate, for his is a much more complex character. A sensitive person, he is as comfortable giving flowers to an engineer's sick wife or to his fiancée as he is roping a steer; he is as manly burying a favorite chicken named Em'ly as he is chasing cattle rustlers; he is as masculine holding a baby or crying over the death of an ex-friend as he is shooting a rattle-

snake or defending himself in a gunfight. He is kind to animals and demands that others be kind too, and he possesses a fundamentally religious attitude toward all of life. Despite the fact that he says he "ain't religious," he adds that he "ain't *un*religious," and the narrator elaborates by quoting Coleridge:

> 'He prayeth well who loveth well
> Both man and bird and beast.
> He prayeth best who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.'
>
> These lines are the pure gold. They are good to teach children; because after the children come to be men, they may believe at least some part of them still. The Virginian did not know them, — but his heart had taught him many things. (p. 176)

Besides his strength and sensitivity, the Virginian possesses an interesting combination of ambition and ingenuity. The former he demonstrates in a number of ways: by leaving his home in Virginia at age fourteen to see the world, by learning to read and write the things his fiancée believes are important to an "educated" man, by raising himself up from cowboy to foreman to rancher. And the latter, ingenuity — probably one of the reasons for his success — he likewise exhibits frequently, whether it is in his telling of tall tales about frog legs or his duping of an officious minister. Because of his ambitious goals and his ingenious ways, the Virginian is truly an American legend, the Horatio Alger or Jacksonian hero who sees his opportunities and makes the most of them.

Since attention is so completely focused on this mythic character, the reader might initially overlook an important aspect of Wister's narrative technique: the use of an anonymous storyteller, himself a participant in the actions of the novel, who tells the tale of the Virginian's adventures. In fact, *The Virginian* is an excellent vehicle for alerting the student to point of view and to the possibility that the perspective he is given can be a slanted and sometimes a changing one. Called a "tenderfoot" and the "Prince of Wales" because of his Eastern clothes and background, the teller of this tale gradually becomes a convert to the West. When he begins his stay in the frontier, he describes himself as "dazed." Feeling the strangeness of everything and everyone, he sees himself as a sort of misplaced person: " 'What world am I in?' I said aloud. 'Does this same planet hold Fifth Avenue?' " (p. 31) Yet he quickly becomes acculturated to the Western setting: "No lotus land ever cast its spell upon man's heart more than Wyoming had

enchanted mine" (p. 55). And the narrator becomes equally enamored of the Virginian. Because of the change in the narrator (the development is so great that *The Virginian* could be st lied as a *Bildungsroman*), the novel offers an opportunity for the instructor to raise important questions about narrative technique: Is the anonymous Easterner a reliable narrator? Why or why not? Is any new "convert" an objective and honest seer?

Students can next consider the actual story the narrator tells. It should immediately be apparent that the plot of this tale is two-fold: the events surrounding the upward mobility of the Virginian and the actions involved in the hero's persuading Mary Stark Woods to marry him. While episodic, both plots are obviously connected by the protagonist's role in them, and the various conventions of the Western — tall tales, envelope device, humor, gunfights, lynchings, romance — surely sustain the interest of a mass readership.

The conclusion of the novel, however, raises a question which is not found in all other Westerns: Why does the Virginian move away from individualism and freedom toward marriage, society, and eventual acceptance of that arch symbol of civilization, the railroad? Given this unexpected denouement, the student can be directed to larger issues which, while not unrelated to the novel, are more far-reaching. These concerns include the role of the machine in the development of the American frontier, the relationship between man and technology as well as between man and society, the tension between rugged individualism and assimilation into society. A discussion of the predictable aspects of plot, then, can lead to a reflection upon a not-so-predictable outcome, an outcome which is more unsettling than it is comforting. Thus readers whose first response to the novel was a sense of uneasiness can come to terms with that reaction.

If, for the most part, the plot of *The Virginian* is conventional, so is the theme of this novel a predictable one: in this world of good *versus* evil, moral goodness triumphs. Early on in the novel the reader is given the essential description of the cowboy, the wholesome, moral, new American who is a direct contrast to the old American of the East:

> I loitered here and there, neither welcome nor unwelcome at present, watching the cow-boys at their play. Saving Trampas, there was scarce a face among them that had not in it something very likeable. Here were lusty horsemen ridden from the heat of the sun, and the wet of the storm, to divert themselves awhile. Youth untamed sat here for an idle moment, spending easily its hard-earned wages. City saloons rose into my vision, and I instantly preferred this Rocky Mountain place. More of death

> it undoubtedly saw, but less of vice, than did its New York equivalents. And death is a thing much cleaner than vice. Moreover, it was by no means vice that was written upon these wild and manly faces. Even where baseness was visible, baseness was not uppermost. Daring, laughter, endurance — these were what I saw upon the countenances of the cow-boys. . . . In their flesh our natural passions ran tumultuous; but often in their spirit sat hidden a true nobility, and often beneath its unexpected shining their figures took on heroic stature. (p. 26)

And because of their "heroic stature," these cowboys — most especially the Virginian — are truly able to "play cyards," an image frequpently used to convey the idea of taking whatever opportunity ("hand") one is given, and acting ("playing") quickly and successfully. In this way, as the Virginian says, "man helps them that help themselves," and man assumes responsibility for who he is and who he will become.

The concepts of morality and justice in this "poker-playing" land are simple and straightforward: be self-sufficient ("In bets, in card games, in all horse transactions and other matters of similar business, a man must take care of himself, and wiser onlookers must suppress their wisdom and hold their peace" [p. 141]), be brave ("You must die brave" [p. 240]), and be competent ("You've got to deal cyards *well;* you've got to steal *well;* and if you claim to be quick with your gun, you must be quick, for you're a public temptation, and some man will not resist trying to prove he is the quicker" [p. 243]). To violate any of these tenets is to risk the punishment that transcends courts of law — that is, the punishment of one's peers. In this respect the Virginian is the moral touchstone of the novel, for he never violates the code and he is impelled to punish those who do.

This Western Knight, surrounded by foils who are horse thieves, cattle rustlers, or ruthless individuals, assumes the responsibility for meting out justice in the Wild West. Examining his actions in this way, students can see the Western theme reinforced again and again: the horse thief is hanged, the gunslinger is killed, the lazy ranch hand is dismissed. And it is the Virginian — man, hero, and chief justice — who effects the triumph of goodness in the land of continual struggle, competition, and growth. He is at the center of Wister's novel: setting, point of view, plot, and theme converge in this dominant and mythic figure.

However they are used, Westerns make up an excellent genre to bring into the Intro to Lit course, especially for the general, or non-major, student. This kind of literature is available, substantial, and engaging. Should we pass up such a good buy?

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Submarine, Poor Boy, Hero or Grinder? Linguistics for the General Student in Junior High

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Each fall the seventh grade English team sits down over coffee and sets about the business of blocking out the units of study for the year. Someone always says, "I think we should include 'something' on linguistics," and suppressed groans inevitably fill the room. 'Something' on linguistics has usually meant a week or two of teacher-centered instruction, with the students remaining tolerantly passive at best. That is, until three years ago.

About that time our English Deparment received a letter from a small, out-of-state high school asking us how we pronounced various words. It was this letter that inspired us to try a little 'something' with regional language differences ourselves. We decided we would direct our attentions to the actual differences in word usage rather than pronunciation patterns. It seemed more appealing to seventh grade interests.

The classes started by informally polling faculty, students, and parents for words whose use they thought might differ from one part of the country to another. We were surprised at the number

of terms which were readily supplied. Our list that year was composed of twenty items which we thought might be good possibilities. The list included such words as *crayons, blue jeans, pop, purse, wallet,* and *submarine sandwich.* The class then haggled its way to consensus on the best, most concise description for each item. These were compiled and duplicated.

The next step was more fun. Using maps supplied by a local service station, the students chose 200 towns from throughout the United States with a population between 10,000 and 50,000 people. Addressing the correspondence was a gamble, but we decided towns of this size would probably be large enough for one high school, but too small for two. The locations of the towns were selected carefully with regard to geographic distribution and population. (Of course, a slightly unusual or humorous name helped too. Hungry Horse, Montana, and Yazoo City, Mississippi, had to be included, no matter where they were located.) The towns were listed, assigned a number, and located on a master map of the United States on the bulletin board. After checking a zip code book to make sure each town had a post office, the students selected the names of the towns to which they would write.

After a short review of the form and content of business letters, we began the actual writing. Using a letterhead designed by the class, each student wrote a cover letter to accompany the list of descriptions. In this letter he or she explained the purpose of our unit and asked the cooperation of their seventh grade English classes. They were instructed to supply the term most frequently used in their area for each item described on the list. We included a self-addressed, stamped envelope for their reply. The letter was then addressed to Seventh Grade English Class, City High School, City, State.

After the letters were mailed, we returned to our other units of study; but for the next three or four weeks, each class period began with mail call. We had marked each city on our map with a red flag. As each letter was received, the red flag was replaced with a green one. In order to insure that none of the lists were misplaced after they were returned to us, the students received their letters in care of their teacher at the school. Each day they opened their letters and shared the contents. Frequently, the responding teacher or class would write a letter as well as returning the poll. Some asked for pen pals, some for the results of our study, and others just wished us well. We received a tape from a village in Alaska where English was their second language and where they had no word for *firefly* or *cellar.* We were surprised to receive responses to almost eighty percent of the letters mailed.

When it became apparent that there would be no more responses, we began the work of analyzing the information we had received. A small map of the United States with the locations of each of the towns and their corresponding numbers was duplicated. The returned description sheets (each bearing the number of the town to which it was sent) were placed in numerical order, divided into groups of ten or twelve, and placed in numbered manila folders. That way each group of students would have access to a few sheets at a time and could keep track of the folders they had completed. The students divided into groups and began compiling the information for the single description they had been assigned. Color coding the possible responses, they checked the number on each returned sheet, located it on their map, and marked it with the appropriate color. It was then relatively easy to distinguish any usage patterns which might appear. Each group concluded their analysis by writing a report on their findings and completing a bulletin board copy of their map results.

We have repeated our original study three times now and are still pleased with the results. The unit has become an umbrella for several other things: practice in letter writing, a quiz requiring a knowledge of the location and spelling of each state, and an exercise in map reading. It has served its purpose in providing the student with a better understanding of the nature and scope of his language. And it has given us 'something' on linguistics that the students truly enjoy and remember.

Teaching How to Follow Directions

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How many teachers complain of their students' inability to follow directions? A visit to any teachers' lounge or lunchroom offers a quick answer to that question. Probably anyone who has ever worked in a school is aware of the problem. To show it statistically, one experiment conducted by James Lent is revealing. Two groups of adolescents were compared for their ability to follow ninety-eight directions distributed into sets containing from one direction to five directions. One group had a mean IQ of 50 and the other

group a mean IQ of 101. The non-retarded adolescents made approximately the same number of errors as the retarded adolescents on sets of four and five directions, and almost as many errors on three-direction sets. The errors of the non-retarded group ranged from one on a one-direction set to ninety-one on a five-direction set, for a total number of 216 errors on the ninety-eight directions. In comparison, the retarded group made a total of 326 errors.

Varied reasons are suggested for this unhappy situation: it is caused by an overdose of television, it is a genetic defect of all students in high school or younger, it is a temporary defect appearing just before vacations, or it is a pathetic plea for attention. Another reason — putting the burden on the schools and not the student, his family, or his society — is that little systematic instruction is offered in reading and following directions. The urgency for such instruction is clear as we realize that, as demands for accountability spread, parents will be expecting their children to be more prepared for the real world. Also, it is clear that in this real world not following directions can result in a relatively minor discomfort such as having no dinner, or a more long-lasting hardship such as flunking a test, or the still more serious case of an injury, or it can even be a matter of life and death. As one principal once deplored, in the case of a tornado or fire: "I am afraid of having a real disaster because kids today don't know how to follow directions." The purpose of this article, then, is to offer some general guidelines for teachers who want to help their students follow directions, some specific projects to use in teaching, and some sources where further material can be found.

General Guidelines

There are many things to bear in mind when planning a unit on following directions. A very basic need is to plan *enough* instruction with frequent practice sessions. If this practice were offered *from first grade on*, children might become proficient from the very beginning. Oral directions, which are necessary to begin the unit, should be repeated only once and children should be consistently referred to the written directions. The goal should be independent problem solving without over-dependence on the teacher. All worksheets should have clear, concise, and well organized directions. To begin with, three directions might be the limit. However, since there is no limit in "real life," more complicated sets should ultimately be the aim.

When the actual reading instruction is begun, an important habit

to foster is, first of all, to read all the directions through to the end. In this way the general idea becomes clear and the reader has a framework into which the details fit. The next step is to reread carefully for details, paying attention to specific words, sequence, drawings, graphs, tables, and photographs. One interesting suggestion is to provide every student with "Road Signs for Reading Directions." Colored highway signs — Slow, Stop, and Warning — are positioned in a sample set of directions so that students can see where they must slow down and attend to details.

Another aspect which must be incorporated into a unit on following directions is vocabulary study. Words which are generally used in directions might be listed for dictionary work, games, and flash card practice. Examples of such words are *below, circle, box, column, direction, dotted, example, fill in, horizontal, vertical, match, order, paragraph, phrase, plural, row,* and *sentence.* In addition, words and phrases peculiar to different subject matters need to be singled out for intensive study. These words for an English class might include *prefix, suffix, root, context, sequence, chronologically, substitute a consonant, discuss,* and *compare.*

Entire school districts could profit if they would devote in-service time, or at least some released time, to teacher workshops to develop packets of following-direction units. Each subject area group could then concentrate on their own needs as well as provide packets for such more general areas as map reading, label interpretation, test taking, use of tables of contents and indexes, and filling out forms. Such sharing could provide in a relatively short time enough material for the frequent practice sessions referred to earlier. In this manner, in fact, students might even prepare themselves for life-saving techniques in the event of a disaster!

Specific Projects

The very beginning of the school year would be a sensible time to introduce students to the important skill of following directions. One way to do this is to use a learning stations approach, setting up five or six stations with a few students at each one. Each station would center on a basic concept of the particular course and would contain sets of directions for each member of the group. In science, for instance, one group could follow a set of directions to assemble an animal breeding cage; another could use books to locate answers to questions; others would conduct a simple experiment, or predict and hypothesize, or identify equipment from a chart. In a reading/English classroom the groups might center around these areas: main idea and details, vocabulary, the use of

books, accurate observation, figurative language, and inference and critical thinking. Such an approach has the advantage of not only introducing the students to a particular subject matter but also allowing them to meet and interact with others and allowing the teacher to identify potential group leaders.

Maps are useful in various ways to provide practice in following directions. Students can follow written instructions to get from point to point, answering questions by circling the answer, putting an X or a check on the answer, writing the answer entirely in capital letters or in cursive, writing the answer backwards, or unscrambling the answer. Students can also write instructions for getting from point X to point Y and others follow them, or they can write instructions on how to get to their homes. Even though gasoline stations are no longer sources of free maps, some states' Department of Transportation or tourist centers will supply them for schools. Telephone directories also have local maps, and phone companies can sometimes be persuaded to share their directories with schools. In fact, worksheets made up for phone directories are another rich source for exercises in following directions. Newspapers too can be used for worksheets as well as for map reading. One newspaper (*The Chicago Tribune*) even has a background report on maps, including a page on how to read one. Companies and government offices are another source of free or inexpensive material to be used in a unit on following directions: they might supply different kinds of applications to fill out.

More elaborate projects give intensive training as well as spark interest. One such project involves the cooperation of other members of the building or district staff. Students are instructed to go out of the classroom and follow a certain route to a prearranged location, such as the library, a school office, or a lower grade. Once they arive, the person in charge gives them further instructions on helping out: shelving books, filing folders, stapling, or helping with a game. Another idea is to make a box of Tinkertoys go a long way. One student has the instruction booklet and gives directions for building an item to another student, seated back-to-back. As more groups of two go through the same procedure, directions become clearer and more highly organized and the "builders" become more skillful at following the directions (Berman, 1975). In the middle of a long afternoon, when a snack might pep things up, students can be instructed to write complete directions for making a peanut butter and jelly sandwich. Bread, peanut butter, jelly, a knife, and napkins are then produced and the teacher makes a sandwich for each person according to the direc-

tions he has written. The results, if not very conventional, at least fill stomachs and teach something about both writing and following directions (Esposito, 1973).

Extensive props don't have to be utilized, however. A teacher can produce enterprising projects using nothing more singular than paper, pencil and perhaps scissors. Either oral or written directions can be given for manipulating paper: folding it, drawing and writing on it, turning it over or upside down. Written directions can be handed out for making snowflakes or hats — and the results may provide some fun too. A geometric design drawn on paper can be passed out to each student: a box with decorations, a parallelogram with zigzag lines, a triangle with a circle and dotted lines in it. Students write directions to reproduce their design and others try to follow them. In order to emphasize the importance of clear and complete sequencing, all the students can write directions on any subject they are familiar with, from ice skating or riding a bicycle to sharpening a pencil. The best ones are dittoed off in a mixed-up sequence and the class puts the steps back in the right sequence. An exercise to underscore the importance of reading all directions before starting to work is to write out ten or fifteen somewhat silly instructions, such as "print the address of the school anywhere on the paper," "write your name backwards on the top of your paper," "pat your head," "stand up and walk around your desk," or "raise your hand." The first instruction is "read all the directions first before doing anything," and the last is something like "ignore all the above directions, fold your paper into four sections, and write your name on the outside." Sometimes nothing teaches as quickly as the experience of feeling foolish!

Sources for Further Ideas

So-called "survival" materials are popular these days for basic reading courses. Most of them have good material for following directions. For instance, the Wilson-Barnes booklet, a publication of the College Reading Association, is rich in ideas and actual exercises, as is Scholastic's *Real Life Reading Skills* (a program in functional literacy). Wheatley's inexpensive *Survival Reading Task Cards* are colorful instructions on reading newspapers, TV guides, labels, traffic signs, recipes, indexes, catalogs, and telephone directories — geared especially for grades four to six, but usable as well in higher grades. The Reeves treasure-trove and Wright's pamphlet contain ideas on listening activities. These thus teach not only that important skill but also following instructions. Herber's two publications include some interesting activities for following directions, and the Barnell-Loft series of booklets on

following directions provide many single-page directions with questions, at different levels, and sometimes on interesting subjects such as sports. For continuous practice throughout the year, Scholastic magazines such as *Scope* have in their teacher's editions single pages (suitable for dittos or overhead projectors) in areas such as test-taking and using the library. Puzzles in these magazines like "Cryptograms" and "Challenges" offer further entertaining exercises. Thus teachers should be able to assemble and accumulate units to help their students develop ability in this urgent skill of following directions. Some day their life may depend on it.

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The Bermuda Triangle on Trial: Pop Culture in the English Classroom

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Whenever possible I like to take advantage of students' immediate and enthusiastic response to the pop culture by bringing it into my English classes. Over the years I have worked with TV programs, comic books, radio shows, and music, treating such subjects as violence, Bunkerism, advertising, and rock lyrics. The current interest in the Bermuda Triangle is especially adaptable and suitable for the general student, and the unit described here lends itself to a multi-media approach that includes critical reading, research, speech, dramatics, and composition. The activity is easy to structure and direct, taking about three weeks of class time, and works best with grades nine through twelve.

You will need several books about the Bermuda Triangle for the students to read as background. In teaching the unit, I have used four: Berlitz, Kusche, Spencer, and Winer (see bibliography). Supplementary material should be made available since some students will need to read beyond their specific assignments. The bibliography appended to this article will be sufficient for your purposes, but if you require a more comprehensive list, one can be found in Kusche's study. Our school library contained most of the titles, certainly all the important ones, as student demand had prompted the librarians to order them in quantity. You will also need a Video Tape Replay or a 16 mm movie projector. Students will probably want to make charts, maps, or other visual aids, and you can provide materials for these if you wish. Let them find their own costumes and props unless you have ready access to such items.

Begin preparing the class for the unit several weeks in advance by dropping a few casual remarks or questions concerning the Bermuda Triangle. This will enable you to determine how much the students know about the subject and stimulate a curiosity that you can build to enthusiasm. They pick up on this quickly; many students already have much to say about the Bermuda Triangle, and class discussion, even at this informal stage, will be lively and filled with conflicting opinion.

After the preliminaries you can initiate the unit proper. First explain that the class is going to put the Bermuda Triangle on trial

to determine whether it is guilty of swallowing up people, planes, boats, and ships inexplicably, or whether the events can be explained rationally as the result of natural causes. Next assign each student one of the four or five primary source books about the Bermuda Triangle, limiting the distribution of Kusche's book to fewer readers than the others. Each student should read only the book which has been assigned to him unless you specify otherwise, thus creating a situation where the entire class has information on a topic, but through four or five different views and interpretations of it.

Give the class a few days to begin reading, then assign individuals to specific incidents that occurred in the Triangle according to the account they are reading. The most comprehensive list for you to work from is Kusche's. Try to create dramatic situations for each student: for example, "You are Captain Moorehouse of the ship *Dei Gratia*. In 1872 while sailing through the area known to some as the Bermuda Triangle you happened across a strange and curious occurrence. Tell us what you found." Or, "You are Carol A. Deering of Bath, Maine. What happened to the ship named after you?" Because of the number of incidents, students will have to be assigned two or three each if you wish to cover all the possibilities, but the exercise can be limited to the major disappearances in the Triangle, the minor ones omitted to conserve time.

Individual students should become expert on the incident assigned to them. They can read further on that episode from other sources, but they cannot read anything else from another source. This directs them to the supplementary material you have gathered but preserves the integrity of the differing views of the Triangle. In reality, of course, several students will read from other accounts on the sly, but this will only encourage more controversy later, and that is what you most desire.

During the course of the trial, each student testifies as an expert witness on a particular incident for the prosecution and the defense, taking the stand and bearing examination by the attorneys for both sides. Encourage them to be as dramatic as possible in these presentations, speaking in a dialect, using costumes, props, or whatever else they want to attempt. Let them refer to notes if they need to. This is a good place to work on some speech habits that we all-too-often neglect in the English classroom, such as delivery, voice control, and clarity.

You should select a team of attorneys to prosecute and defend the Triangle. Pick these carefully, choosing those who have an interest in prosecuting or defending, those who are gregarious

enough to carry the role, and those who can organize and arrange the material. Their role in the unit will be considerably more difficult and require much more time and preparation than the remainder of the class. The attorneys will need your guidance to create the adversity necessary for the trial to become exciting. Tell them they can slant the issue through their questions, summon only those witnesses they wish, and try to confuse witnesses; they should do everything possible to enhance their side of the case and discredit their opponents'. Encourage them to make maps, charts, and diagrams necessary to aid their case and convince the "jury" that they are right.

When the preparations have been completed, initiate the trial. This should be accompanied by appropriate ceremonies, rearranging the classroom into the semblance of a courtroom, and appointing a bailiff to swear in the witnesses (with an appropriate oath). If you decide to preside over the trial yourself, make a grand entrance, with the Bailiff preparing the courtroom by reading a formal statement, written by the class, to announce the beginning of the proceedings. If you can find one, wear a black gown of some sort and carry a gavel. After your entrance, impanel the jury and caution them on personal bias and interpretation of evidence. Tell them to take notes for use later.

During the first few days while the class is reading and preparing you can arrange to have them visit a local court to attend an actual trial. Besides being a valuable experience in its own right, the visit will provide a model for the activity in the classroom. If such a visit is impossible or inconvenient, proceed with assurance: the frequent renderings of trials in television programs and movies have made the students familiar with the courtroom, and they will move forward with little hesitation.

As you preside, keep a list of evidence presented by each side. You can use this to summarize the previous day's activities and to recapitulate the presentations before deliberation by the jury. Call the attorneys to the bench for instruction when necessary to speed things up or clarify points. Handle their objections and admit or reject evidence. If you are not expert at this it won't matter; you can get by on horse sense. Above all, keep the trial moving as swiftly as possible.

After all witnesses have testified and the attorneys have made their closing remarks, prepare the class, now the jury, for its deliberations. This is actually a writing assignment. I ask them first to explain what the Bermuda Triangle is (description and definition), then to summarize the issue concerning it (exposition).

After this they are to give an account of the class's activity (narration). Finally they have to indicate whether they find the Triangle guilty or innocent and list the reasons why they decide as they do (exposition, persuasion). As I have indicated parenthetically, the various parts of the assignment fit the modes of discourse and touch on some of the patterns of development, e.g., exemplification and definition. If you have not already done so, you can take time here to explain some of these forms and help them organize their writing accordingly. After the written assignment has been completed, call for the vote and record it.

Now you can show the class "The Case of the Bermuda Triangle," a documentary prepared for NET's "NOVA." The program is for rent or sale and is available on 16mm film and ¾" video cassette from Barbara Culbreath, Time-Life Multimedia, Time & Life Building, Room 32-48, New York, NY 10020, (212) 556-4525. This program can be examined for organization, bias, argumentation, and exposition, as well as other techniques appropriate to the medium. After they view the program, poll the jury again to see how many change their minds about the verdict.

I have found the unit a successful and satisfying activity for the English classroom. The students practice some of the speech patterns we encourage, examine media presentations of material, and learn the relationship of classroom exercises to the world outside the school. They discover the inefficacy of human testimony and have an opportunity to arrange and order their thoughts on the subject by writing about them. Most important of all they learn to distrust unverified accounts, to discern reliable and unreliable sources, and to accept no information without questioning its validity.

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Burgess, Robert F. *Sinkings, Salvages, and Shipwrecks*, American Heritage, 1970. (Chapter 13, "The Mystery of the Deadly Bermuda Triangle.")
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Jeffrey, Adi-Kent Thomas. *The Bermuda Triangle*, New Hope, 1973.
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Short and Sweet: A Selection of 100 Books With Under 200 Pages

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One of the most frequent requests I get is for suggestions of really good books that don't take forever to read. Teachers want a variety of titles that can easily be worked into a crowded curriculum and students, looking for something to report on, invariably ask for what they call a "skinny" book. Even the brightest kids are often hard pressed for time and the "general student" is usually more turned off by the length of a reading assignment than discouraged by the challenge of the text itself. The following is my own very personal choice to fill the bill, augmented by titles which have popped up so frequently as favorites on student polls that I must consider them sure-fire.

You'll see that the books suggested make up a very mixed bag.

Classics share equal billing with pop selections that would never win literary awards. There are oldies but goodies along with recent titles. The range is wide — from the purely recreational to books deserving class study, from junior novels to works that would challenge a college student. Many genres are represented. What they all have in common is both brevity (fewer than 200 pages) and some kind of appeal or value that has made them memorable.

The limitation to books of 200 pages or less is completely arbitrary and unfortunately disqualifies some top-notch candidates, but the cut-off point had to be set somewhere. And the number listed could as easily have been 150 or 200. I confess that the list might be different, were I to compile it next month — or even next week. I hope that in spite of these shortcomings you'll find the recommendations useful, even if they serve only to jog your memory for titles of other enjoyable "slim" books.

Here it is, then — a selection of books that are both short and sweet.

Chinua Achebe, **THINGS FALL APART,** Fawcett Premier, 1959.
A classic of modern African literature. Deals with two themes recurrent in contemporary fiction: society in transition and human non-communication.

Woody Allen, **GETTING EVEN,** Random House, 1966.
A collection of really hilarious essays written by one of the funniest men around. Best known in the visual arts, Allen illustrates in this book not only his original comic perspective but also his genuine writing talent.*

William H. Armstrong, **SOUNDER,** Harper Trophy, 1969.
A classically simple tale of a black rural family which suffers separation from the father. A Newbery Award winner that can be enjoyed at any age.

Claude Berri, **THE TWO OF US,** Popular Library, 1968.
France during World War II is the setting of this heartwarming story of a Jewish boy sent from the bomb-threatened city to live in the country home of an anti-Semitic peasant who does not know the lad's religion.

Judy Blume, **THEN AGAIN, MAYBE I WON'T,** Dell, 1973.
A junior novel dealing with a boy's adjustment not only to new family wealth but also to the usual problems besetting the early years of puberty. Amusing handling of delicate situations. See also Blume's delightful ARE YOU THERE GOD? IT'S ME MARGARET.

Pierre Boulle, **PLANET OF THE APES,** Signet, 1963.
Well known through film spinoffs, this imaginative futuristic novel features a turnabout of the positions held by men and apes.

Ray Bradbury, **FAHRENHEIT 451,** Ballantine, 1953.
Since important issues are dealt with in this futuristic novel, it makes a fine assignment for class discussion, especially when teamed with other novels which treat oppressive state control of the individual, such as Ayn

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* *A few of these annotations were written while a member of the Committee on the Senior High School Booklist of the National Council of Teachers of English. They appear in somewhat modified form in the new sixth edition of* **BOOKS FOR YOU.**

Rand's ANTHEM. Also excellent short Bradbury works are DANDELION WINE, a coming of age story, and MARTIAN CHRONICLES, a good intro to sci-fic.

Gwendolyn Brooks, **SELECTED POEMS,** Harper & Row, 1964.
Selections from A STREET IN BRONZEVILLE, ANNIE ALLEN, and THE BEAN EATERS. Ms. Brooks received the 1978 Illinois Author of the Year Award for her outstanding poetry.

Sheila Burnford, **THE INCREDIBLE JOURNEY,** Bantam, 1961.
A Canadian classic about an arduous journey undertaken by a Siamese cat, a young Labrador retriever, and an old bull terrier. Belongs on every list of distinguished animal stories.

Albert Camus, **THE STRANGER,** Vintage, 1946.
Meursault, a young French Algerian, tells his own story of the last year of his life. This unusual novel of murder raises central philosophical questions — about the nature of a "hero" and about meaning in an absurd world. For mature readers.

Truman Capote, **OTHER VOICES, OTHER ROOMS,** Signet, 1948.
An early novel by Capote that is one of his best. The childhood impressions of a sensitive Southern boy are both vivid and dramatic. Autobiographical overtones.

A. C. Clarke, **CHALLENGE OF THE SEA,** Dell, 1966.
Best known for his science fiction novels, Clarke brings the same kind of expertise to this fascinating consideration of the part the sea may play in man's future. Won a Junior Book Award as a favorite with young readers.

Robert Cormier, **THE CHOCOLATE WAR,** Dell, 1975.
Although its image of human nature is far from pleasant, this story of a rebel in a Catholic boys' school demonstrates that a novel written for adolescents can stand up under literary scrutiny.

James Gould Cozzens, **CASTAWAY,** Vintage, 1930.
A bizarre and suspenseful story of a man "lost" in an empty department store. Provocative reading for bright students who liked ROBINSON CRUSOE, for it gives new psychological depth to the man-alone theme.

Clarence Day, **LIFE WITH FATHER,** Knopf, 1948.
This nostalgic and amusing picture of a patriarchal family in the 1880's still can hold its own.

S. Dunning, E. Lueders, H. Smith, **REFLECTIONS ON A GIFT OF WATERMELON PICKLE,** Lothrop, 1966.
A selection of modern poems with special appeal for young readers. See also Lueders' ZERO MAKES ME HUNGRY, a sequel. Both volumes are visually attractive.

Henry Felsen, **STREET ROD,** Bantam, 1953.
A teen-age novel about cars and kids that makes enthusiastic readers of a lot of students impossible to reach with any other kind of book. Felsen's HOT ROD is also an all-time favorite in this category.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, **THE GREAT GATSBY,** Scribner's 1925.
Gatsby's romantic obsession for Daisy, a beautiful socialite, is the moving force behind his drive for the fortune he thinks will make him worthy in her eyes. Gatsby's fate at the hands of those he admires reveals the shallowness of his dream.

Ian Fleming, **DR. NO,** Signet, 1958.
A typical James Bond adventure which demonstrates that in his own genre,

Fleming was a master. Mythic patterns and motifs abound (brave "hero," challenging quest, archetypal villain and monsters, etc.). All the books featuring this 007 agent provide exciting reading.

Margaret Forster, **GEORGY GIRL,** Berkley, 1966.
The lively self-willed heroine of this British work satisfies her maternal instincts and finds happiness in non-conformity. Read before assigning.

Robert Frost, **YOU COME TOO,** Holt, 1959.
A collection of some of the best of Frost's poems for young readers.

John Gardner, **GRENDEL,** Ballantine, 1971.
The Beowulf legend is here retold from the viewpoint of the hero's first adversary — the monster Grendel. An imaginative story phrased in a style reminiscent of the original version — sparked by onomatopoetic phrases and the evocative sprung rhythms of Anglo-Saxon poetry.

Nikki Giovanni, **MY HOUSE,** Morrow, 1972.
Childhood memories are tapped for many of the poems in this volume. See other works by this gifted black poet: SPIN A SOFT BLACK SONG, GEMINI, etc.

Fred Gipson, **OLD YELLER,** Pocket Books, 1956.
An all-time favorite about an ugly yellow dog and the family that adopts him in frontier Texas.

Rumer Godden, **THE GREENGAGE SUMMER,** Avon, 1951.
Sure-fire ingredients for recreational reading — a delightful family, romance, mystery, suspense. The Grey children get an unexpectedly liberated vacation in France when their mother's illness leaves them stranded in a small hotel.

William Golding, **LORD OF THE FLIES,** Putnam, 1959.
Teachable and discussion-inspiring, Golding's novel about boys struggling for survival on an isolated island during World War II presents a non-romanticized view of human nature.

Lorraine Hansberry, **A RAISIN IN THE SUN,** Signet, 1958.
One of the best 20th century plays for classroom study. Family as well as racial tensions are forcefully portrayed.

Ann Head, **MR. AND MRS. BO JO JONES,** Signet, 1967.
A favorite with adolescents because of its realistic treatment of problems faced by a young couple forced by circumstances to marry.

Ernest Hemingway, **THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA,** Scribner's, 1952.
Santiago, an old Cuban fisherman, finally succeeds in landing a giant marlin, but his valiant struggle ends in disappointment. A modern classic.

Hermann Hesse, **SIDDHARTHA,** Bantam, 1971.
The story of Siddhartha's lifelong search for values and meaning has much to say to today's young people. Simply but effectively told.

———, "Youth, Beautiful Youth," in **THE RITE OF BECOMING** by Arthur & Hilda Waldhorn, Meridian, 1969.
A short story which deserves a place with Joyce's PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A YOUNG MAN and O'Neill's AH, WILDERNESS as a work dealing with the joys and pains of coming of age.

James Hilton, **LOST HORIZONS,** Pocket Books, 1939.
A perennial pop favorite with a Utopian theme. This story of the imaginary Shangri-la has been made familiar by film versions.

S. E. Hinton, **THE OUTSIDERS,** Dell, 1968.
Melodramatic or not, this novel written by an Oklahoma teen-ager is still

valued for getting the reluctant to read. Gang warfare, violent homicide, heroic rescues, adolescent loyalties are all treated rather sentimentally — but the kids love it.

Isabelle Holland, **THE MAN WITHOUT A FACE,** Bantam, 1973.
A fourteen-year-old, who flunked the entrance exams to boarding school, gets help from an accident-scarred recluse. The story of their relationship breaks new ground for the junior novel. See also Holland's OF LIFE AND DEATH AND OTHER JOURNEYS (1975).

Richard Hooker, **M*A*S*H,** Pocket Books, 1969.
Fans of the TV series should be encouraged to read the book from which the lively characters sprang. The madcap antics at the Mobile Army Surgical Hospital in Korea provide riotous rec reading.

Richard Hughes, **A HIGH WIND IN JAMAICA,** Perennial, 1928.
A satiric adventure tale of children and pirates in the early days of navigation by steam. The sub-title, "The Innocent Voyage," is pure irony. Golding has identified this novel as an influence on his LORD OF THE FLIES.

Irene Hunt, **UP A ROAD SLOWLY,** Tempo, 1968.
A Newbery Award winning novel about a girl growing up. Frequently listed by students as a favorite.

Aldous Huxley, **BRAVE NEW WORLD,** Perennial, 1932.
No student of Utopian literature should fail to read this masterful fantasy of the future. It depicts a world dominated by science and industry with Henry Ford as the object of worship.

Shirley Jackson, **WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE,** Viking, 1962.
Mystery and surprise add interest to this story of two sisters, one of whom is suspected of poisoning members of the family. A strange but fascinating novel by the writer who gave us the unforgettable short story, "The Lottery."

Henry James, **THE TURN OF THE SCREW,** Signet, 1962.
A governess' tale of evil. But who *is* possessed? — the narrator or her "innocent" young charges? Or is the governess a neurotic and her whole story a case history for Freud? A masterful work which always stimulates the imagination. (James has written many memorable short works: WASHINGTON SQUARE, WHAT MAISIE KNEW, etc.)

Dorothy M. Johnson, **INDIAN COUNTRY,** Ballantine, 1965.
Also published under the title of one of its short stories, "A Man Called Horse," this excellent collection of tales of the Old West includes "The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance."

Franz Kafka, **METAMORPHOSIS,** Bantam, 1972.
A classic example of psychological fiction. George Samsa, a young working man burdened with family responsibilities, awakens one morning to find himself transformed into a giant cockroach.

Yasunari Kawabata, **THOUSAND CRANES,** Berkley, 1965.
An impressive story of love and guilt written by one of Japan's most gifted novelists.

M. E. Kerr, **DINKY HOCKER SHOOTS SMACK,** Harper-Row, 1972.
Dinky's mother is more concerned with other people's children than with her own daughter, who has a weight problem in addition to the usual teenage hangups. Like all Kerr novels, this one is sparked by witty dialogue and is fun to read.

Jean Craighead George, **JULIE OF THE WOLVES,** Harper-Row, 1972.
After Julie has survived an ordeal in the frozen Northern wilderness by finding shelter with wolves, she has difficulty adjusting when she returns to her own people. An award winning novel for young readers.

John Knowles, **A SEPARATE PEACE,** Bantam, 1966.
With the publication of this novel about adolescents, Knowles joined Salinger and Golding at the top of "most frequently read" lists.

Jerzy Kosinski, **BEING THERE,** Bantam, 1972.
A remarkably simple novel to have such satiric bite. About a mentally retarded protagonist raised in complete isolation, with only a garden and a TV set to occupy his attention. What happens to him when he is forced into the outside world provides a study of sharp contrasts. Read before assigning!

Oliver LaFarge, **LAUGHING BOY,** Signet, 1971.
This love story between Laughing Boy and Slim Girl won a Pulitzer Prize for its author. Gives insight into the struggles of the Navajo to survive amidst the evils and temptations of modern civilization.

Alan Jay Lerner, **MY FAIR LADY,** Signet, 1956.
This adaptation of Shaw's PYGMALION is excellent for average students, but more mature readers should be steered to the delightful original by Shaw, who gave the Cinderella story a very different outcome.

Ursula LeGuin, **THE FARTHEST SHORE,** Bantam, 1972.
This is the last of the Earthsea trilogy, having been preceded by A WIZARD OF EARTHSEA and THE TOMBS OF ATUAN. LeGuin has developed a real following with young readers who like fantasy.

Madeleine L'Engle, **A WRINKLE IN TIME,** Dell, 1962.
Although written as a junior novel, even college students find exciting this story of children who, in seeking their lost father, pass through a time wrinkle into another dimension. A Newbery Award winner.

John D. MacDonald, **A PURPLE PLACE FOR DYING** (1964), **THE DEEP BLUE GOODBYE** (1964), **BRIGHT ORANGE FOR THE SHROUD** (1965), etc., Fawcett.
These and other MacDonald novels with colors in their title all feature adventures of Travis McGee, handsome sleuth headquartered in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. The series makes good escape reading.

Ross Macdonald, **THE BARBAROUS COAST** (1957), **THE DOOMSTERS** (1959), etc., Bantam.
Cited are just two of the many excellent Lew Archer mysteries. Macdonald has been credited with lifting the detective story to the level of an art.

Bernard Malamud, **THE NATURAL,** Dell, 1965.
An offbeat novel about baseball by one of America's best contemporary writers. For mature readers.

Kamala Markandaya, **NECTAR IN A SIEVE,** Signet, 1954.
Life in India among the poor is intimately portrayed in this book. Often compared to Pearl Buck's THE GOOD EARTH.

Sharon Bell Mathis, **TEACUP FULL OF ROSES,** Avon, 1972.
An exploration of relationships in a black, inner-city family. A junior novel oft cited for excellence.

Carson McCullers, **THE MEMBER OF THE WEDDING,** Bantam, 1950.
Twelve-year-old Frankie, cut off from family and friends her own age,

can't understand why she can't go along on her brother's honeymoon. A rare and sensitive work. Also in dramatic form.

Herman Melville, **BILLY BUDD,** Signet, 1961.
A classic story about the handsome and pure sailor who becomes a legend. Allegorical implications make this a fine book for class discussion.

James A. Michener, **THE BRIDGES AT TOKO-RI,** Bantam, 1955.
A Korean War novel that's a favorite with boys. Depicts the heroism aboard an aircraft carrier.

Yukio Mishima, **THE SOUND OF WAVES,** Berkley, 1971.
The plot may be somewhat predictable, but this novel is distinctive because of its authentic Japanese background. Overcoming all obstacles, Shinji wins both fortune and fair lady.

Alberto Moravia, **TWO ADOLESCENTS,** Bantam, 1950.
These two stories by the Italian master belong on any list of significant works dealing with adolescence. For mature readers.

Sir Thomas More, **UTOPIA,** Norton Critical Editions, 1975.
Mature students should be urged to read this seminal masterpiece of satire and irony. This edition supplies backgrounds and criticism to aid understanding.

Robert Nathan, **PORTRAIT OF JENNIE,** Popular, 1962.
A romantic fantasy beloved by girls. Every time Jennie mysteriously appears to a young artist, she is startlingly different — as if her life follows a different time scheme.

Sterling North, **RASCAL,** Avon, 1963.
The author tells of his childhood shared with the captivating Rascal, his pet raccoon. Animal lovers will count this warm and charming story among their favorites.

George Orwell, **ANIMAL FARM,** Signet, 1963.
Through this fable of a farmyard revolt, Orwell succeeds in capturing in clear and simple terms an impressive image of political realities. This book should be reserved for readers mature enough to grasp the full import of Orwell's message.

Gordon Parks, **A CHOICE OF WEAPONS,** Falcon, 1968.
The autobiography of a multi-talented man. Noted as a photographer, musician, novelist and film director, Parks describes his life from Kansas farm to big city. He made a choice to fight for survival in a white man's world through developing his gifts.

Richard Peck, **DREAMLAND LAKE,** Avon, 1973.
Decatur, Illinois, is the setting for this junior novel written by the 1977 recipient of the Illinois Author of the Year Award. See also Peck's other novels and his excellent collections of poetry for young readers: PICTURES THAT STORM INSIDE MY HEAD and SOUNDS AND SILENCES.

Robert Newton Peck, **A DAY NO PIGS WOULD DIE,** Dell, 1974.
Thirteen-year-old Robert narrates vivid memories of growing up on a farm in Vermont during the 1920's. He is forced to assume responsibilities and face hard realities before his time. Packs an emotional wallop.

Sylvia Plath, **ARIEL,** Harper and Row, 1961.
This volume of poems has found many readers among the young who have made a cult figure of the tragic poet who took her own life. Also a favorite is her early novel THE BELL JAR.

George Plimpton, **OUT OF MY LEAGUE,** Pocket Books, 1967.
Plimpton is popular with sports-loving readers because of his humorous accounts of competing with pros at their own game. This book centers on baseball; see also his hilarious THE PAPER LION, THE BOGEY MAN, etc.

Katherine Anne Porter, **PALE HORSE, PALE RIDER,** Harcourt Brace, Jovanovich, 1965.
An effective psychological novel with a World War I setting. See also Porter's FLOWERING JUDAS AND OTHER STORIES when looking for works with a Mexican background.

Erich Maria Remarque, **ALL QUIET ON THE WESTERN FRONT,** Fawcett-Crest, 1929.
A classic World War I novel which is profoundly anti-militarist in philosophy. A German teenager is its central character.

Jean Rhys, **WIDE SARGASSO SEA,** Popular Library, 1966.
A fascinating novel set in the West Indies — of special interest to those who have read JANE EYRE since it gives a fictitious account of the early days of the first Mrs. Rochester.

Conrad Richter, **THE LIGHT IN THE FOREST,** Bantam, 1954.
Conflict between cultures is highlighted in this frequently taught story of a white boy raised by Indian foster parents. True Son cannot betray his white heritage and yet prefers life among the Indians who had once taken him captive.

Philip Roth, **GOODBYE COLUMBUS,** Bantam, 1970.
When Neil Klugman, an intellectual young librarian, falls in love with Brenda Patimkin, he finds that he and the plumber's daughter live in entirely different worlds. Funny but with satiric point.

Francoise Sagan, **BONJOUR TRISTESSE,** Dell, 1955.
The first novel of a young French woman describes the excitement and pain of a brief romantic liaison. Escape reading. Read before assigning.

Antoine de Saint Exupery, **THE LITTLE PRINCE,** Harvest, 1943.
This allegorical fantasy about a downed airman's encounter with a little prince is a favorite with many, whether read in translation or in the original French.

J. D. Salinger, **THE CATCHER IN THE RYE,** Signet, 1953.
Censorship problems or not, this is still the best novel of adolescence available that has both an inimitable style and tremendous widespread appeal.

———, **NINE STORIES,** Little, Brown and Co., 1953.
Perhaps the best follow-up for readers who love Holden is this slender book of matchless stories.

Carl Sandburg, **EARLY MOON,** Voyager, 1978.
This paperback edition of Sandburg's poems for young readers should be on every classroom shelf.

Erich Segal, **LOVE STORY,** Signet, 1970.
Although this best-seller has been regarded with condescension by critics, it still succeeds very well in appealing through exploiting tried-and-true motifs: Cinderella and the "prince," father-son conflict, and the rags-to-riches pattern in addition to its timeless theme of tragic love (à la ROMEO AND JULIET, CAMILLE, etc.)

Robert Sheckley, **THE TENTH VICTIM,** Ballantine, 1965.
A story with an astounding scheme for ridding the world of people born

with a thirst for blood: let the amoral and the ruthless destroy each other! Pop fiction.

Alan Sillitoe, **THE LONELINESS OF THE LONG DISTANCE RUNNER,** Signet, 1959.
A short story by a leading British contemporary author about a rebellious inmate of a reform school who resents pressure to represent the institution as a long distance runner.

William Sleator, **HOUSE OF STAIRS,** Avon, 1974.
An easy-to-read junior novel that deals with behavior conditioning and mind control in a futuristic society.

Muriel Spark, **THE PRIME OF MISS JEAN BRODIE,** Dell, 1966.
A teacher's influence on six impressionable young charges is seen in this novel about a private girls' school in England.

John Steinbeck, **THE PEARL,** Bantam, 1956.
A memorable tale which has allegorical implications — about how the finding of a large pearl fails to bring the anticipated happiness. Also recommended short works are Steinbeck's TRAVELS WITH CHARLEY and THE RED PONY.

Robert Louis Stevenson, **DR. JEKYLL AND MR. HYDE,** Bantam, 1945.
Stevenson's imaginative story of dual personalities is a classic. Though the mad-scientist motif is much used in pop fiction, Stevenson's probing into the psyche won the admiration of Carl Jung, whose theory of the shadow archetype is anticipated in the portrayal of Mr. Hyde.

John Tunis, **HIS ENEMY HIS FRIEND,** Avon, 1967.
The dean of sports fiction in mid-century has here written an interesting novel of a Nazi sergeant who, years after the war, meets on the soccer field the son of a man he shot as a hostage.

Voltaire, **CANDIDE,** New Century Classics, 1946.
Written in the 18th century by the French satirist Voltaire, this tale of an innocent's adventures through what his tutor calls "the best of all possible worlds" is a splendid spoof of the prevailing philosophy of optimism. For mature readers.

Kurt Vonnegut, Jr., **SLAUGHTERHOUSE FIVE,** Dell, 1974.
An "in" book during the 60's because of its imaginative condemnation of war and violence. Might cause censorship problems.

———, **GOD BLESS YOU, MR. ROSEWATER,** Dell, 1973.
Meet Eliot Rosewater — super-rich, super-sensitive lover of all mankind. Considered insane because of his offbeat views, humble lifestyle and servile dedication to the world's derelicts, Rosewater finds solace in alcohol and his fire-fighting hobby.

Evelyn Waugh, **DECLINE AND FALL,** Dell, 1928.
A masterful work of satire. Those familiar with Voltaire will be amused by this treatment of a modern-day Candide, who teaches at a private school in Wales.

———,**THE LOVED ONE,** Dell, 1948.
A macabre novel savagely satirizing many aspects of upper-middle class Californian society — especially its burial customs. Dennis Barlow, employed in a Hollywood pet cemetery, falls in love with Aimee Thanatogenos, a mortuary cosmetician, but he gets competition from Mr. Joyboy, the embalmer.

Barbara Wersba, **RUN SOFTLY GO FAST,** Bantam, 1972.
Father-son conflict is at the heart of this unusually hard-hitting junior novel.

Nathanael West, **THE DAY OF THE LOCUST,** New Directions, 1962.
A satirical novel about Hollywood in the thirties. A sardonic view of California — the land of dreams.

Leonard Wibberley, **THE MOUSE THAT ROARED,** Bantam, 1971.
A serio-comic story of a small duchy whose war declaration against the United States is not taken seriously until, through a series of ludicrous events, it achieves a position of global bargaining power. Farcical but entertaining.

Elie Wiesel, **NIGHT,** Hill and Wang, 1972.
This true story, the first in a sequence of autobiographical accounts, is narrated by a Jewish boy who, with his family, is taken to a Nazi extermination camp during World War II.

Thornton Wilder, **THE BRIDGE OF SAN LUIS REY,** Washington Square Press, 1927.
A disaster caused by the fall of a footbridge which spanned a gorge in Peru gets the attention of a Franciscan friar, who begins a probe into the lives of the victims. Based on an actual event of over 250 years ago, this short novel can be recommended to those caught up in the current wave of disaster stories.

Paul Zindel, **THE EFFECT OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN-IN-THE-MOON MARIGOLDS,** Bantam, 1970.
A rather depressing but dramatically effective play about a family dominated by an off-beat mother whose shattered dreams affect her daughters, one of whom, miraculously, may find the fulfillment her mother never had.

———, **THE PIGMAN,** Dell, 1968.
In writing about their friendship with Mr. Pignati, both John and Lorraine come to a new self-awareness. One of the most popular books with adolescents today.

Responsive Teaching and Communication in the English Classroom

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The classroom is a teaching/learning community. The quality of relationships among members of this community is an index of the quality of learning for all — for the teacher as well as for

Dr. Farmer delivered these remarks in her luncheon address to the 1978 Fall Conference of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English on October 21. Dr. Farmer is the immediate past president of the National Council of Teachers of English.

students at all levels of skill and confidence. And that quality is largely determined by the effectiveness of the teacher's communication and of each learner's response.

Communication, the key to both teaching and learning in all areas of the curriculum, is for the English teacher both content and process. Communication is also a necessary element in building a community; it is the work that binds us into social groupings, beginning with the family; it is the sign of human membership. The rapid pace of social, political, and technological change gives new urgency to the need for development of more effective teaching of English to students of diverse backgrounds, and the need for more effective communication among diverse groups within the community.

What I am calling responsive teaching in the English classroom can help us meet both needs.

The classroom is a kind of microcosm of the larger community, in which teaching and learning are — by the teacher — disciplined, ordered, and professionally managed toward specified purposes. In the English classroom (or the language arts class in the elementary grades) that purpose is to help learners grow in power over the uses of language. Ours is a special case in teaching because language — in its many forms, the content of our teaching — is the chief medium of instruction.

Presumably, as graduates of other teachers' English classes, we are at least modestly adept in both — the language and its uses — adept enough, that is, to know how limited is our mastery of either. We know that communication is always imperfect and incomplete; we know that the effort to communicate — verbally and non-verbally with them — requires continual interpretation, restatement, response. In other words, it requires dialogue. And we know about words. To quote from T. S. Eliot's "Burnt Norton," we know that words "strain, crack, and sometimes break under the burden," of communicating changing ideas. But we also know that the effort is always necessary, and sometimes successful.

The model for this responsive teaching is at least as old as Plato's *Dialogues* — as new as the satellite-transmitted videoconference that is just emerging as a means of political dialogue in this country.

Let me remind you of what Plato had two conversants say about education a couple of thousand years ago:

> Socrates: . . . a freeman ought not to be a slave in the acquisition of knowledge of any kind. . . . Knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind.

Glaucon: Very true.

Socrates: Then, my friend, . . . do not use compulsion, but let early education be a sort of amusement; you will then be better able to find out the bent.

Let us call your attention first to the tone of this passage: it is one of what I consider "elegant courtesy." You will remember that this style runs throughout the dialogues: "my friend," "very true," "my dear Glaucon."

Courtesy is the first essential of communication, and it is fully available to us most of the time from most of our students, if we know how to tap its sources. I'll tell you how I, at least, try for this and usually achieve it.

First, though, a comment on the content of this passage from Plato — the idea that learning is to be pleasure — that we are to find out the learner's natural bent, his real interests, and then teach.

Here I must refer you to a little story told by the author, William Sheehan, whose daughter is a kindergarten teacher. It's about one of her students who, when it was his turn to tell what he was most thankful for, said "Thank you, God, for school." Sheehan's comment:

> Somewhere, an astounded Creator clapped his hands. One of his creatures had understood his creation. Had realized he was born to be a success in a successful universe. Had discovered what a wonderful thing it is to be a human being. Had found himself lovable and his friends and teacher loving. And was using his tools, his sight, smell, touch, taste, hearing, and intellect for creation, growth, and self-discovery.

That is the meaning of the *Dialogues* for me, and the character of responsive teaching: two human beings approaching each other — Socrates and Glaucon, Miss Sheehan and the kindergartner, you and each student you teach — as equals — learning, teaching, questioning, answering, working closer and closer to the truth about themselves and about human society and the universe in which truth exists. And doing so not only in sometimes tedious, reductionist, word-attack drill — or in vocabulary-controlled readers — but often in play, in celebration of life. André Favat (*Child and Tale*) reminded us that children "read what they please, or — more accurately — what pleases them." And Bruno Bettelheim illustrated generously, in *The Uses of Enchantment,* the uses of imaginative literature (with its great, monstrous word-load!) in the intellectual, social, and emotional growth of children. He said: "We lose a lot of kids' interest because we ask them to read truly

stupid stuff, in order to teach 'specific skills' whose importance escapes them (and us)."

Responsive teaching of English is teaching that engages teachers and students in learning and sharing experiences in language and literature for their growth as whole human beings.

I want to illustrate responsive teaching — including ways of writing and sustaining classroom courtesy — by references to real teaching situations — my own and those of colleagues and friends. Let's consider responsive teaching in each of four modes: (1) oral language, (2) literature, (3) writing, and (4) language skills.

1. *The Teaching of Oral Language*

Oral language first, of course. The model that I use for my work in responsive teaching grew out of my response to fear of failure (my own, not my students') in my first exciting teaching experience in what was called a "difficult" urban high school. My graduate courses in education had assured me that these "culturally different" students were "non-verbal learners." A former college English teacher with major scholarship in 14th century English literature, and a fondness for Shakespeare, 17th century English poetry, and American literature from its beginnings, was considered likely to be ill-suited to the task of keeping these students silent and seated at their workbooks to fill in the blanks.

It was odd, though, that none of my courses taught me how to shut off the stream of vivid — even racy — language these non-verbal learners kept on producing. And as a lover of language, of living literature, and of people, I had no wish to turn it off. It became the central fabric of our work.

We studied the art of conversation, graded our progress (mine, too), knew and liked each other better everyday. Our worksheets — summarized here — stated the reciprocal responsibility of speakers and listeners for: (1) demonstrating mutual respect and courtesy, (2) giving at least the appearance of interest, on theatrical evidence that it's easier to feel friendly if you set your face in amiable lines, (3) giving as accurate verbal and non-verbal information to the other person as you can, and (4) reading and answering the other person's messages.

Use of the following checklist gave us opportunity to evaluate our oral skills:

Classroom Communication Scale

The Teacher as Communicator:

_____1. Selected content with special reference to needs/ interests of learners.

_____2. Helped learners establish relationships between content and previous learning/real concerns.
_____3. Remained "in touch" with learners (eye contact, I-you language).
_____4. "Read" learner response (verbal/non-verbal); made appropriate adjustments (explicit/implicit).
_____5. Arranged and presented material in order that makes sense to learners.
_____6. Used language in a clear and unambiguous way.
_____7. Demonstrated interest in and respect for learners.

The Learner as Communicator:

_____1. Exhibited facial, postural demeanor suited to attentive listening.
_____2. Provided positive reinforcement (gesture, movement, facial expression) as appropriate.
_____3. Signaled (gesture, movement, facial expression) need for teacher to change direction, clarify meaning, hasten conclusion, as appropriate.
_____4. Limited overt communication with others, to reduce distraction and/or distortion of the primary communication process.
_____5. Provided overt response when appropriate.
_____6. Worked to receive and translate message into personal meaning.
_____7. Demonstrated interest in and respect for teacher.

This scale, modified and structured differently by different groups, serves well in a wide variety of informal and structured classroom activities, and helps develop and maintain a communication climate in which language learning can flourish.

2. *The Teaching of Literature*

Explication, literary analyses, dramatization, role-taking, reporting, discussion, evaluation, sharing — all are ways of responding to the author.

The clearest example of this responsiveness that I have experienced in my own teaching was given to me by my four Hamlets. Four senior classes, all reading *Hamlet* in the same semester, recreated the sad prince differently for me each hour of the school day. Four Gertrudes, four Ophelias, and all the rest — "what a feast was there!"

Each of us can recall similar experiences, each giving evidence of the deep well of vitality, the spontaneous, living freshness in the

depths of what we rightly call the classics. We remember, too, the sometime shock of finding an entirely new meaning brought from a new reader's different life experience to a standard, familiar piece of literature.

As we quite properly expand the range of literatures that we bring into the classroom, I hope we keep the center firm: that with the literatures of the whole American family, and of the Asian and African experiences, we retain the best literature of the European and the British experiences. As we — and our students — have more and more aspects of the human experience to respond to, we need to keep clear our membership in the whole human race, and in the ancient as well as the contemporary experience. Our children need this wholeness.

3. *The Teaching of Writing*

From reading to making literature is a short distance, the converse communicative art. To facilitate responsive teaching, I recommend:

(1) the interaction classroom, in which students write for and share with one another, developing mentally a sense of audience and a responsive style;
(2) the collaborative classroom, in which teacher and students write, together and independently, and share;
(3) the (occasional) composition conference, through which meaning and structure are brought together through productive dialogue.

4. *The Teaching of Language Skills Across the Curriculum*

Particularly in the middle and upper grades we need to encourage teachers of other subjects to do what good elementary teachers have always done — *teach the skills (and arts) of language in conjunction with whatever they teach.*

We can open the way for this in our English classrooms, again by teaching in a way that is responsive to the real interests and developmental/intellectual needs of our students.

(1) Teach reading/writing skills in conjunction with:
    (a) newspapers and other journalistic media,
    (b) biography and other non-fiction,
    (c) readings in social history,
    (d) career studies.
(2) Make the expanding interests of our students a guide to the range of our teaching.
(3) Give students the opportunity to make guided use of lan-

guage skills in the practical exercises of adult membership in the community, as workers and consumers.

How does it all come together? Let our friends Socrates and Glaucon answer for us.

Socrates: (at twenty) . . . the sciences which they learned without any order in their early education will be brought together, they will be able to see the natural relationship of them to one another, and to truth.

Glaucon: Yes, he said, that is the only kind of knowledge which takes lasting root.

Socrates: Yes, I said; and the capacity for such knowledge is the great criterion of dialectical talent: The comprehensive mind is always the dialectical.

Our students are not the only beneficiaries of responsive teaching. Martin Buber once said: "We are molded by our pupils and built up by our works." We learn with and from our students.

As our own communication powers expand, then, through this classroom dialogue, we are more and more at ease — as we want our students to become — in successively wider circles of influence. We are able to draw more fully on community resources; we develop action alliances with others — partnerships with parents, for example, as well as with other professional and community groups. Through our professional association, especially, we are learning to interact more effectively with journalists, with legislators, and with government bureaucracies to influence the circumstances of our teaching.

The purpose of our teaching is clear: to help each learner achieve, through mastery of this language and its literature, power to build a strong self, to develop healthy relationships with others, and to contribute to the growth of the good human community. We know that for many of the children and young people we're teaching today we do not, in fact, have "world enough and time." Every class session is crucial in some learner's life. We know about too high dropout rates, about the throwaway children, and about teenagers who roam our streets and die in our jails and gutters, who are unrelated, disconnected, lost. We need to teach early, well, and often — how to communicate responsively through all the modes and forms of language; and we need to teach — by our own example — how to use this power to become whole and mature persons. And we need to use this power as professional adults to build our own lives in a shifting society, to influence the circumstances of our lives, and to change these circumstances when we must.

Another ordinary woman summed this up for me.

I Am Not Done Yet
as possible as yeast

MATERIAL REMOVED DUE TO COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS

where i'm going.

From *An Ordinary Woman*
By Lucille Clifton

Bibliotherapy in the General Curriculum

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In the constant search for ways to support students socially and emotionally in their learning tasks, an obvious tool that teachers sometimes overlook is bibliotherapy, or the use of literature in the helping mode.

Although the conscious use of books and readings for guidance in the solution of personal problems was begun in the early 1800's, it was not until the 1940's that the usefulness of bibliotherapy for schools began to be recognized. Growing pressures on the classroom to achieve success at both educating and developing social adjustment enhanced the value of literature in the helping mode. Sensitive teachers now use selected readings to guide class discussion and development, to probe student problems, to clarify feelings, and to prompt resolution of troublesome situations.

There are several ways that bibliotherapy can be of value. Certainly a most significant use is to help students gain insight into their own behavior and that of others. Bibliotherapy can present material that may recreate an incident or problem in a student's

life, giving the student the opportunity to discuss and analyze the problem as an observer rather than a participant. With personal pressure reduced, the student may be able to think more clearly, and perhaps accept possible solutions that may be suggested during discussion.

Students can also be helped through properly selected readings to realize that they are not alone in their emotions, handicaps, or problems. Class discussion of a story can bring out the fact that very few problems are unique to one person. The sharing of responses can also help students gain a better perspective as to the seriousness of their problems. The reading of stories that relate to a student's situation can also foster feelings of identification with the author or character presented, again suggesting to the reader that others have shared the same problems and have found acceptable solutions.

Bibliotherapy can also help students identify with others and adjust their thinking accordingly. It can be used to foster greater understanding of those unlike one's self, those of a different race, ability, or perhaps nationality. The fears that are generated by ignorance of another's motivations can be examined and perhaps laid to rest. The classroom can be more comfortable for all when students are more understanding of each other, and fears and tensions are lessened.

Finally, bibliotherapy can help students relieve some of the stress and anxiety that their problems may have caused. Their problems can become less frightening as they are experienced in the life of another. In a supportive discussion of a problem based on a story rather than personal experience, the guidance of the teacher becomes indirect, and perhaps more acceptable. The talking out of the problem can have a tension-relieving effect, with individual students gaining confidence through exercising the ability to verbally structure the situation. Having vicariously dealt with a fictional problem, the student may feel a new competency in handling real situations. In this low-stress state, the teacher or students may also be able to suggest acceptable solutions or courses of action for the future.

Literature can also relieve stress by introducing fantasy, which serves as a diversion from some of the immediate difficulties of reality. In a like manner, humorous readings can break the tension of a class situation and encourage students to adopt a different attitude.

In order to use books in the helping mode in your classroom, you will need to identify those persistent problems that affect the age group and level of the class you are teaching. Recurrent prob-

lems tend to include feelings of inadequacy, prejudice, problems at home, and a record of failure, but each class has different needs and only the teacher can determine what they might be. At this point your strongest ally should be the school and/or public librarian who can help you in finding books that "speak" directly or indirectly to many of the problems of young people.*

The categorization of stories and selections under some basic and relevant problem areas can make it easier for you to match the book with the needs of your students. A listing based on problems might look like this:

1. *Search for Identity*
   Allen, Elizabeth, *The Loser,* E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1963.
   Madden, Betsy, *The All-American Coeds,* E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1972 (also deals with boy/girl abilities).
   Rinkoff, B. J. Rich, *Member of the Gang,* Crown Publishing Inc., 1965 (also offers insights into life in the inner-city).
2. *Peer Pressures*
   McClintock, Leon, *Cross-Country Runner,* E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1974.
3. *Drug Dependency*
   Mathis, Sharon Bell, *Teacup Full of Roses,* Viking Press, 1972.
4. *Learning Disabilities*
   Rinkoff, B. J. Rich, *The Watchers,* Crown Publishing Company, Inc., 1966 (also explores the problems of a parent's unhappy marriage).

Books in the helping mode can best be used when a few basic principles are observed:

1. Determine clearly the problem that you are dealing with.
2. Make sure you have some familiarity with the selections you will be using.
3. Have available several selections that are relevant to the problem being handled, so that the student may have a choice of the most interesting.
4. Select a quiet time and place for the reading of the selection.

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* *Editor's Note: A good source for titles of books dealing with problems and young people is NCTE's* **BOOKS FOR YOU,** *A Booklist for Senior High Students, 6th Edition, pp. 78-88.*

5. If you are dealing with one student, find a private spot to discuss the selection or assign a personal essay on reactions to the story. If the entire class is involved, assure them that the discussion is private.
6. Match the form of the student response assigned to the student or class being dealt with. It might be a class discussion or individually written essays. Some students express themselves best through poetry. Whatever assignment you select, your aim should be to effect reconsideration of the situation presented by the readings.

At this point, the question might be raised as to the responsibility of the English teacher for a student's class adjustment. Obviously the guidance department is responsible for dealing with the serious personal problems affecting students, and the administration should handle the problems arising from situations within the community, such as racial tension. Yet the problems besetting students are often not so severe as to warrant professional help, though they are serious enough to affect class participation. A concerned teacher can do a great deal to improve a class's atmosphere for learning through creating a comfortable working environment.

Bibliotherapy represents an effective means of dealing with noncritical but disturbing class situations. Guided by their teacher, students can deal not only with the form of literary selections but also with the content, and perhaps thereby gain insight into the problems they face.

A Call for Manuscripts

Topics and deadlines for next year's issues of the *Illinois English Bulletin* are:

Fall: THE CLASSICS REVIVIFIED	July 31, 1979
Winter: REMEDIAL ENGLISH	September 30, 1979
Spring: 1000 TOPICS FOR COMPOSITION, REVISED	A Committee Project
Late Spring: BEST ILLINOIS POETRY AND PROSE (Student Manuscripts Only)	January 31, 1980

Manuscripts should be fairly short (5-10 pages, double-spaced) and submitted in duplicate. Avoid footnotes. For style, check copies of past issues. Provide full identification of school affiliation and note if manuscript has been submitted elsewhere. Articles to be considered for the fall and winter issues should be sent by first-class mail to Dorothy Matthews, English Department, University of Illinois, Urbana 61801.

Student manuscripts to be considered for the late spring issue should be sent to designated chairpersons of the judging committees as announced in this bulletin.